

Novaya Gazeta: We are not afraid



The killers have no fear because they know they will not be punished. But neither are their victims afraid, because when you defend others you cease to fear.

On 19 January in the centre of Moscow Anastasia Baburova, a journalist with Novaya gazeta, and the lawyer Stanislav Markelov were shot dead. The killer stood behind them and aimed at the back of the head. He had no reason to fear. Not one such public political assassination has yet led to a trial or conviction.

Stanislav Markelov was an exceptional lawyer.

He took on hopeless and dangerous cases. A Moscow attorney, he was constantly in Chechnya, representing the interests of the victims of extra-judicial punishment and torture. He also dealt with cases elsewhere of those who had been attacked by Russia's fascist groups.

Stanislav defended those who were killed or humiliated by the State. He was a friend to

our newspaper and its legal advisor. He was responsible for the civil cases of Anna Politkovskaya, defending those she wrote about. He represented our journalists in court. Stanislav was attorney for the family of Igor Domnikov, an editor with Novaya gazeta who was murdered in 2000, and tried to force the authorities to open criminal proceedings against those who were behind that killing and who remain, to this day, at liberty.

Anastasia Baburova only joined Novaya gazeta in October 2008.

She very much wanted to work for the newspaper and decided to investigate crimes committed by Russia's Nazi groups. She had very little time to do her job.

In essence, Stanislav and Anastasia were simply decent people who could not tolerate what the majority in our country has accepted. That was enough for the lords and masters of Russia to issue their verdict, for those who are allowed to kill in our country.

These were the latest killings of those who did not fit within the present system. A 34-year-old lawyer who defended Chechens



against Russia's military, and defended Russia's soldiers from their corrupt commanders. He spoke out against the neo-Nazis who are supported by the regime and defended Russia's anti-fascists whom the regime sends to prison. Markelov defended journalists and rights activists and was himself a defender of human rights. As a consequence in the elite milieu of the capital's attorneys he was regarded as an outsider.

25-year-old Nastya Baburova was also a romantic rebel, an anarchist who took part in the anti-fascist movement and the Dissenters' marches.

It was no accident that she found herself in such company: she quite consciously chose that path in life. In the eyes of the regime and ordinary people, who only want to keep out of trouble and quietly survive the present regime, Nastya's choice also made her an outsider. Therefore few people in our country could die as she did, struggling to apprehend the assassin. In the office in front of which Stas and Nastya were shot people heard gunfire and even understood immediately what had happened. They were afraid to go out, however, or even to glance through the window.

The motive behind Markelov's murder could be found in almost any of his cases. These include that of Budanov. Stanislav Markelov was demanding that new charges be brought against ex-colonel Budanov, just

released on parole, for the rape of Elza Kungayeva. The chances of success were quite high since the details of the rape that preceded her 2000 murder by Budanov are recorded in the case materials.

It could well be that the former superiors and accomplices of "Cadet", the policeman Lapin from the remote Khanti-Mansiysk region, were behind Monday's killing. Lapin



was eventually sentenced to 11 years imprisonment for the abduction, torture and murder of a Chechen lad Zelimkhan Murdalov. (Stanislav Markelov represented his parents in court.) Lapin's superiors also took part in such abductions and torture sessions. Warrants were issued for their arrest several years ago but, supposedly, no one knows where they are.

The order to kill the lawyer could have come from Chechnya. Markelov with provocative bravery took on cases concerning the secret prisons built in the Kadyrov family's native village of Tsentoria, where Chechens are tortured and killed.

After the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, with whom Stanislav Markelov was closely linked through North Caucasian affairs, we realised that more of our people — the newspaper's journalists, lawyers and rights activists — could be next. After Anna was killed many people waited for the regime to speak clearly and take decisive action. What

we actually heard would have better not been said. On Monday the list of our losses was continued by Markelov and Baburova. It's no surprise. We are not the only ones to pick up the message being sent out by the regime: all the country's fascist trash also understand it very clearly.

It was not by chance that Stanislav and Nastya had been friends for many years (she was only 25!) They were people who had an absolutely clear understanding of good and evil. Such abstractions acquire meaning when people act.

The killers have no fear because they know they will not be punished. But neither are their victims afraid, because when you defend others you cease to fear. Those today who are fearful are the people who keep out of trouble, trying to survive these bad times, when the bad times (for some reason) never seem to end.

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